



Complete in Christ 2

Colossians 2:12-19

The passage we are looking at this evening amplifies my last point this morning. We are made alive in Christ. To Paul's Gentile readers this was an important promise of God to attach to. On one hand they were being pulled by Greek philosophers and mystics trying to get them to believe that Jesus was nothing but a created being that could not reach the perfection of God, and on the other, Jews who said Jesus was only a man and the only way of having true faith was to become a proselyte – by becoming circumcised and following the Law.

Paul stresses to them the importance as Gentiles, of the fact that Christ has made them alive. Once they were Gentiles – outside the Law. They were completely spiritually dead – outside the law, no access to hope. They had none of the promises of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – not that necessarily helped Jewish people come to a real faith in Christ as we well know.

Here's the contrast with what the Gentile Colossians had been given:

But God has now brought you to life with Christ. God forgave us all our sins; 14 he cancelled the unfavourable record of our debts with its binding rules and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross.

But God It's that phrase. The one that in scripture turns situations round. That brings hope where there is none, that changes minuses to pluses. But God. *He* did something about it. He's the One that brought us to life in Christ. He makes us complete in Him. We were given this simple fact in verse 12 which we looked at this morning. *12 For when you were baptised, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ through your faith in the active power of God, who raised him from death.*

This is one of those verses I believe suffers from the "confusion of baptism" - a failure to transfer baptizo as immersion which therefore confuses the description of immersion with the rite of baptism. The rite of baptism is the symbol of the inward process described here.

When we trusted Christ, we were immersed in Him. We were identified with Him as a cloth dipped into dye (baptizo is a dyeing term). What was soiled and horrible about us was changed into His preferred colour. As He has been raised to new life, so have we and in the process we have come out alive and clean.

In verses 13 onwards Paul now goes on to say what God has actually done to us through this immersion into Jesus which underlines what I have just said.

So what does having been immersed in Christ and raised done to us who have come to Him in faith and followed Him?

◆ Our sins were dealt with

God forgave us all our sins; 14 he cancelled the unfavourable record of our debts with its binding rules and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross.

Our immersion is a cleansing. Actually immersion could refer to cloth being bleached as well as dyed. Same process – result is dazzling white! We are not just forgiven, but our debts are cancelled – our sins He remembers no more – remember the last word of Jesus – tetelestai – the deal is done: “it is finished!” That statement of debt clearance was nailed literally to the cross as Jesus. Finished, done, complete.

This finished work was something neither Judaism or Greek religion could promise. They had to strive after moral perfection if they were Jewish and if they were Greek, their flesh was so evil that they could never be cleansed. I think that's why Paul uses the concept of immersion so strongly because it speaks of change from one state to another. Of course the rite of baptism the outward sign of that immersion into Christ that occurred when we believed.

◆ Our freedom was purchased.

15 And on that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession.

But our immersion into Christ did more than deal with the matter of our sin. It freed us from the power and authority of spiritual rulers. For Jesus, the cross was not just a stitch up by the Jews but a conspiracy of the spiritual powers and authorities too. His resurrection was a statement of power. Being human placed the Son in the position of being the same as us, manipulated by human power and the spiritual powers that are behind the world – we even read of His temptation by the devil.

In resurrection Jesus did what they can't do – raise people back to life – that is only in the purview of God. His raising back to life wasn't just a shock to human beings at the time, but a humiliation to the spiritual powers and authorities who seem to have thought that they could get one up on God. The picture Paul gives us is one of humiliation: *he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession.*

This is why deity of Christ is so important. Forgiveness of sins required a perfect sacrifice – only God had that perfection. To exercise power over death and therefore over anything and everything is again something only of God. And Jesus did both. The challenge for us is that in being immersed into Him, we have come into good of

both the forgiveness and the power and authority, which we don't exercise of our own accord, but as a result of Him working through us.

The final verses in our reading tonight are a piece of advice to the Colossians regarding both the Greek and Jewish detractors which in effect says "Don't be intimidated by people who sound good – what they propose is just not of God, won't save them and has nothing to do with the power and authority of Christ.

Verse 16 and 17: *16 So let no one make rules about what you eat or drink or about holy days or the New Moon Festival or the Sabbath. 17 All such things are only a shadow of things in the future; the reality is Christ.* These verses deal with the Jewish error. For those swayed by the "Only authentic worship of God" argument of Jews Paul's attitude is, forget it – don't make rules. The wording here is a bit strange. I think the wording here refers not to the future from that point, but a comment that these rituals looked forward to a future event. That future is now here. There reality is Christ. There is no need to have these things any more as Jesus is the real deal.

Verse 18 – *Do not allow yourselves to be condemned by anyone who claims to be superior because of special visions and who insists on false humility and the worship of angels. For no reason at all, such people are all puffed up by their human way of thinking 19 and have stopped holding on to Christ, who is the head of the body.* The Greek side was a variety of mystical stuff. The Roman Empire was a hotbed of religions and there were lots of people around who claimed special powers and visions. Paul's attitude is don't be intimidated by people with special visions etc. Why?

Strip it all down to the roots and even if they dress themselves up as Christians – they are focussed on self not on Jesus – they are not rooted in the right place. If you come across anyone who claims to be a Christian and claims special powers, special revelation or who just wants money – then start ringing alarm bells. They still exist today! Ask the question – are they still holding on to Christ?

The whole idea of being rooted to Christ is very important. It is both something we should take a rain check on in relation to any ministry or activity we are involved in – however laudable it is. It is also a yardstick for dealing with others. Where's Jesus in this?

To conclude, verse 19 pulls it all together.

For no reason at all, such people are all puffed up by their human way of thinking 19 and have stopped holding on to Christ, who is the head of the body. Under Christ's control the whole body is nourished and held together by its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God wants it to grow.

For whoever and whatever we come across that dresses itself as Christian, whether that be any people or organisations locally, or whether that be something that's national or international -or more topically, on the internet – we ask the question of where Christ is in it, because if Jesus is in it, then it grows as God wants it to grow. I so want to see revival in this land. To see the church growing under the prompting of the Spirit of God. We see the green shoots in many places even here.

But as we look to see growth of the branches, look at the roots, look hard at them because only what is rooted in Christ will truly grow and be lasting.

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